THE GRUNT OF THE PIGSKIN

By WALDO ADLER

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A fumble on the forward pass.

THE grunt of the pigskin as it strikes the ground was suddenly heard one day in the main street of Goldfield, Nevada, during the height of the boom times. Scarcely had that unmistakable sound been heard than young men and old came tumbling out from buildings on both sides of the street. There was one of the Poes, whose name is as classic in football as in literature; there were old and young collegians drawn from every quarter of the United States. Men who had passed one another every day without a sign of interest quickly fell into chummy conversation, and from that moment on had the mutual advantage of one another's society. It had taken the grunt of the pigskin and the answering rush of each man who had played football or seen football to draw them together.

Do you, Reader, remember your own feelings when in your childhood your mother would hold out to your unwilling mouth and nostrils a tablespoonful of castor oil? What you felt then is what a majority of football coaches and players felt eight years ago when the rule makers nailed the "forward pass" onto football. American football is founded upon the principle that the ball must be advanced through a resisting enemy's lines; either by direct attack, or by drawing him out of position through a fake attack and then advancing, or by outflanking him.

Emphasis has always been placed upon the principle that the advance is made by carrying the ball. And the only exception to this, the advance by kicking the ball, is so carefully advertised in advance (by the maneuver of sending the man who is to kick double the usual distance back of his forward line) that it may be safeguarded against. The forward pass was regarded by coaches, players, and ex-players alike as foreign to American football, because it violated this fundamental rule, that to advance toward the enemy's goal you must *hold* the ball and outrun, outdodge, or with a stiff arm ward off opponents. To give up possession of the ball by flinging it into the air and yet to retain equal rights with opponents to recover it, this was something new and in reality foreign to the spirit of the game.

The old game (previous to this new rule) put a premium upon ruggedness, upon the bulldog quality of holding what you had and relentlessly fighting your way forward, never giving up possession of the ball. This tradition of bulldog tenacity with the ball had been bred in the bone of football generations, until it had actually produced its own clear-cut type of man.

Do you remember Coy of Yale, that blond giant whom football men cannot forget, and still love to refer to as the most perfect specimen of a player who ever forced his way through an enemy's lines? Six feet two he stood in his stockings, and one hundred and ninety pounds of lean flesh and high-toned muscle were his. Do you know that when this living dynamo scored touchdowns against his chief opponent not even he was able to bore his way *through* the whirl of meeting bodies, but had to be lifted on the hips and shoulders of his mates until he was high enough in the air to fling himself over the scrimmaging forward across the goal line for the score? This sort of attack, in which he who carries the ball bulls his way right through the ranks that solidly oppose him, had led to the injuries and deaths resulting from the close-packed mass attack, and thus had justified the introduction of the forward pass as one means of saving the game.

Of course the main change in the game has not been the introduction of the forward pass, but the forbidding of mass play by means of the rule that provides a penalty of fifteen yards against a team whenever two or more of its players are seen aiding one another in attack by pushing, pulling, or encircling arms.

WHAT use has been made of the forward pass? In general, it has been used most successfully in its skeleton form to scare opponents. The rules require that a forward pass be made from at least five yards behind the forward line. The average style of direct attack, however, is formed much closer than that to the forward line. Therefore, when the watchful opponents see men in the back field of the attacking team over five yards back of the rush line they must prepare for either a kick or a forward pass, *i. e.*, they must send men back twenty yards or more; thus greatly weakening their own defense by destroying its compactness.

Having thus threatened a kick or forward pass, the attacking team is now in the agreeable position of being able to carry out either one of its threats or to drive a direct attack into the opponent's line with good chances for a good gain, and with the certainty of retaining the ball. It must not be forgotten, however, that such teams as Springfield Y. M. C. A. College and Carlisle Indians in the East, University of the South and Vanderbilt in the Middle South, Notre Dame University and other lesser elevens, have used the forward pass not as a threat but as a chief method of attack, with some success. Yale defeated Harvard by a long forward pass in 1906, and the Army turned the trick against the tremendous Navy eleven by its use at the New York Polo Grounds at the end of last season.

The success of the forward pass, now that its elements have become so well known, depends upon complicating and varying its preliminary (the backward step and side run) and upon rifle-like speed and accuracy in the arm of the passer and the brain of the receiver. A light Springfield eleven held the ball and took it one hundred yards down field against the last Indian team on which Thorpe played, by means of nine successive forward passes. Dorais and Rockne of Notre Dame, quarterback and end respectively, at West Point last fall, by their forward passes simply overwhelmed the Army eleven. The coaches at the Point, once they had seen the light, were not slow in following it, and used the pass successfully in their own chief game.

The aim of attacking by kick is twofold,—to keep the ball in the enemy's country, and so to keep the enemy himself on pins and needles, sending him high, hard balls that come down long-end over long-end with a straight drop that makes the catcher dizzy with nervousness and likely to muff the ball, thus allowing the enemy to recover it close to the goal; secondly, to save the attackers' own backs from the strain of effort in midfield that goes for little, and keeping them fresh for a supreme effort once the kicking policy has brought them close to scoring territory, *i. e.*, within twenty-five yards of the opponent's goal. The classic example of this policy successfully pursued is the kicking of Percy Felton of the winning Harvard team of 1912. The value of a fine kicker who can average forty yards a kick against a light wind has been greatly enhanced by the change of two years ago, reducing the length of the

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Interference following a forward-pass play.